

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) attended a public meeting with Department of the Interior Secretary Salazar and key Department of the Interior staff on California drought disaster. Following the meeting, Costa released the following statement.

“Today’s meeting was helpful, and Secretary Salazar should be commended for holding the meeting, but what has taken the Department of the Interior so long to act? It is clear to me that the Department of the Interior simply does not understand the severity of California’s water crisis. Every day, I listen to Valley farmers and community leaders begging for a solution to the crisis. But, there’s been little action from the Department of the Interior and the Administration. They need to fully realize their responsibilities. The faces I see in the San Joaquin Valley cannot wait for another study; they cannot wait for infrastructure; and they cannot wait on ‘hope’.

“It is my wish that today’s announcements constitute an action plan that will begin to make a difference. I have always prided myself on working with all parties to arrive at solutions. The Department of the Interior must now start taking the hard, necessary steps to rectify the inequities of their antiquated policies.

“Our state is at a crossroads on water issues, and strategic decisions are needed now. What took the Department of the Interior so long to announce an MOU? This could have been done months ago, at the inception of the Drought Task Force. This natural disaster has been exacerbated by the administration’s failure to use every regulatory tool at their disposal – the federal government has provided relief with other disasters and the failure to do so now is turning our Valley’s drought disaster into the Obama Administration’s Katrina.

“The time for action is now! Our Valley has been patient, but already looming on the horizon is next year’s planting season. Will the federal government have the pumps on to provide water during planting season? It’s time to end the bureaucratic red tape: our Valley needs solutions now.”